
3-15-1995

How the Raccoon Got Its Mask

Michael Kocik

Keri Krause

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle>

Recommended Citation

Kocik, Michael and Krause, Keri (1995) "*How the Raccoon Got Its Mask*," *The Mythic Circle*: Vol. 1995 : Iss. 18 , Article 18.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle/vol1995/iss18/18>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Mythic Circle by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>



Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



Additional Keywords

Fiction; How the Raccoon Got Its Mask; Michael Kocik; Keri Krause

HOW THE RACCOON GOT ITS MASK

Story & Illustrations

by Michael Kocik & Keri Krause

Down along the banks of the Camilarri, beneath the spreading branches of the cedar groves, a lone raccoon nuzzled its nose among the roots of the Xymlath and sighed a deep sigh. The frosts of winter had melted slowly away, yet the warmth of spring had not yet brought with it the fruits of summer. Ever since the passage of three moons, Robb had been hunting for food for his family without turning up more than a handful of roots and dried, un-ripened berries.

Robb was about ready to head back to his burrow when he heard a loud crunching noise behind him. The fur on his back began to rise as he bared his claws, when out popped Melumba the mole.

Robb heaved a sigh of relief and exchanged greetings with Melumba. Even though the mole was carrying a sack that looked quite heavy with delectable nuts and jams, he looked as miserable as if there were nothing but rocks on his back.

"Bad days, oh bad days," Melumba growled with a shifty glance as he caught Robb staring at him. "Many were the times when the Camilarri washed ashore food enough

for all, yet now I have to roam days from home to bring enough for even one meal. Oh, bad days!"

Robb found himself nodding in agreement, although he would have been content to have found one tenth the stash Melumba was carrying. "And where have you been to return with such a store?" Robb asked, sniffing and rubbing his nose against the sack.

"Nowhere!" growled Melumba, as he squinted his eyes shut and shifted the weight on his back. "And you would do well to stay away from me when I hunt, or you will feel my claws deep through that pelt of yours."

Robb was too hungry to run away from such a threat. He knew that if he pressed hard enough, the mole would be glad to part with a bit of information to avoid sharing any of his hoard. So, he kept on at him until Melumba exploded in fury:

"At the base of the sun and beyond the mists of the mountains lies a rich forest where the goddess of light lives. But beware her eyes, for the smallest glance will burn the paws in your tracks. Now be off, and let me be!"

So saying, with a bit of mud thrown up behind him as

he scurried away, Melumba disappeared into the cedar groves and left Robb to his own thoughts. Robb had often before heard legends of *Elinari*, the witch of light, and the riches hidden in her land – yet many an animal who had wandered there in search of that wealth had never returned.

Robb nibbled hard at the bark of the Xymlath until its bitter juices trickled over his mouth. The pains in his stomach were fierce, and he reflected that if the famine *were* to continue, maybe death at the hands of a witch could be no worse than the lingering weakness of starvation. So, with a sharp intake of breath, Robb turned himself west and made off in the direction of the land of *Elinari*.



There was no telling how many days and nights passed before Robb caught sight of the Hinnendyrell range of mountains. For more than a week he had lived off the green fish of the Camilarri, as his nose led him from one mossy bank to the next. Yet soon even those brackish waters had fallen behind him, and he was forced to scramble through lowlands and bogs where nothing but dark red worms met him at every turn. Just when he had given up hope of ever tasting a decent meal again, the ground mist broke and he spied the mountains Melumba had talked about.

Ahead of him as he ran he saw giant outcroppings of rock stretching outward like yellow teeth. He could smell the sweet scent of spruce, from branches stretching like quills into the cold sky, and his nostrils were giddy with the possibilities of food hidden there. His paws crackled and scraped themselves over the dry earth in their hurry to move faster before night, yet his hunger did not allow him either to slow down, or rest.

As daylight faded, Robb cleared the last rocky knoll and entered the dark forest. Not a sound could he hear about him other than the stealthy padding of his own paws as he

hen it seemed that even his stomach could hold no more, Robb felt overcome with a biting thirst that ached everywhere inside of him. Stopping in his tracks long enough to see where he was, he spied a tiny brook off to his left about a hundred yards distant. Padding off in that direction as the last of the sunlight ebbed, he fell into the brook -- splashing and drinking with a fury until he was as wet on the inside as his fur was soaked on the outside. It was only then, when the last of the cold water hit him, that he realized he had lost his way and was now deeper in the forest than he had ever intended to go.

Shivering so rapidly that even his fur seemed to shudder, Robb looked about him nervously and became aware that, except for the steady drip-drip-drip of the water running off his back, not a sound broke the gloom around him. Too weary to move, yet too fearful to sleep, Robb nudged the moist bank with his nose as he wondered what to do.

Everywhere about him, the same shrubs he had fed off moments before still glowed with a bluish light, yet even those colors faded when he drew nearer. It was then that he realized that those lights were meant to show him the way in, but not lead him out, and he gave off another shudder.

Like all animals of the wild, Robb had a great deal of common sense and cunning. Glancing over at the brook, he knew that every stream of water, no matter how small, had its source; so, if he could keep to the bank, he might be able to find his way home before further misfortune fell his way.

So, with a stubborn shake of his head, Robb fell back upon the narrow bank and sniffed steadily from one side to another. Everywhere about him he imagined he saw red eyes glaring out at him from murky recesses, yet he was too frightened to stand still long enough to discover their origin. Hour after hour passed in this painstaking manner. Just when Robb had begun

to lose all faith in himself and his instincts, he saw a tiny clearing ahead illuminated by a sparkling green light.

Moving as rapidly as his tired legs would allow him, Robb was about to burst into the clearing when a tiny voice inside of him pulled him up before he was able to show himself. All in all, it was as well that Robb did not reveal himself just then, because right in the middle of the clearing



moved from one bush to another -- greedily sampling the berries and nuts hidden on each. Each shrub seemed to sparkle with its own eerie light, which faded quietly as Robb drew up and gorged himself on its treats. In his hunger, in moving from one bit of vegetation to the next, he was not even aware that he was gradually moving deeper and deeper into the dimmest coves of the forest.

- with her arms outstretched in front of two bubbling black kettles - stood *Elinari*, the witch of light.

Robb inhaled nervously as he realized the mistake he had almost made. From where he was concealed, he could

waterfall. Sniffing around the ground until he came to its source, he wet his lips and nearly danced a jig of joy - for here, impossible as it might seem, was the beginning of the mighty Camilarri! Licking his lips from the familiar taste, he knew there was no mistake; if he could get in that rapid stream, the pull of the current would drag him far away, even from the reach of *Elinari*.

Thinking quickly, Robb stole back to the clearing and made himself a little sack from the densest foliage of the forest. Then, sneaking out into the clearing, Robb filled the sack with as much food and jewels as it could hold. As he moved about, Robb watched the witch moan and sigh in her sleep, yet still she did not awake. It was only when he took one of the rings that fastened her hair, and slipped it on his tail for good measure, that a bolt of lightning shattered through the clearing and split a rock behind him.

Clutching onto his bundle, Robb scrambled away towards the waterfall as *Elinari* awoke and shrieked the most pitiful wail he had ever heard before. Every stone and leaf seemed to echo that

scream, as Robb felt himself trembling all over. Even the ring on his tail seemed to burn with the wail of the witch.

Robb threw himself into the undergrowth in an effort to conceal himself from *Elinari*. Yet, once again, his luck failed him, for the ring he had stolen glowed with the light of a thousand candles and served only to draw the witch nearer to him like a beacon. Even worse, when he tried to pull the ring off, it would only move up an inch at a time - burning black rings all along the fur as it moved - before refusing to budge any further just below the tip.

In desperation, Robb took one of the sharpest jewels from the sack and cut off the tip of his tail. Then, grabbing the ring, he tossed it as hard as he could in the opposite direction, before throwing himself into the waterfall.

Down and around the current dragged him - pounding him from one rock to the next until his poor body was cut and bleeding from each impact. Holding the bundle between his teeth, however, Robb refused to let go, no matter how hard he was jostled.

Ahead of him he could see daylight, and the branch of the Camilarri that would take him home. Just as quickly behind him, though, flew *Elinari*, who had discovered the trick and was coming to take her revenge. If he could only make it to the bend in the river where her domain ended, Robb thought, she would never be able to follow him.



see the long golden hair of the witch, braided into knots of crimson, gold, and silver, and fastened separately with three emerald rings. Wrapped in a dark green cloak, the witch waved her arms above her while sparkling gold coins materialized from the hissing steam of the kettles, sailed across the clearing, and landed in one of several gleaming piles near her.

Robb drew his breath in quickly as he watched her summoning coin after coin from the bubbling cauldrons, barely able to contain his excitement. Then, after a few more minutes of this display, the witch brought down her arms and the fire under the kettles gradually faded away. Rubbing her eyes slowly, the witch removed her green cloak, lay it before her on the ground like a blanket, and then promptly stretched herself upon it and fell asleep.

Robb observed that, with her cloak removed, the witch's garments were as pink as satin and embroidered with leaves of every tree in the forest. About her where she was sleeping, Robb could make out vast piles of treasure such as he had never envisioned before - sapphires and stones that seemed to smile instead of sparkle, as well as mounds of food that made his mouth water even though his stomach was already full.

About two hundred yards off to his left, in the path across the clearing, Robb heard the steady gurgling of a

There were just a few more yards to go . . .

As the waterfall dropped him into one of the shallow pools of the Camilarri, however the witch loomed up in front of him with dark eyes that flashed cold with anger. Pointing at Robb with a long, bony finger as he lay trembling in the morning light, she threw a shard of black

and rocks where his treasure had been. Then, leaning down to the water to bathe his face and cover his disappointment, he was astonished to find a masked stranger glaring up at him from the reflection in the stream.

Tearing furiously at the sides of his face, Robb discovered the price he had to pay for being a bandit – a permanent mask to mark his misdeeds for the rest of time. And so, passed along from one generation to the next, must come this story to relate HOW THE RACCOON GOT ITS MASK.



light at him which struck him in the forehead.

"Thief thou art, and thief thou shall be known for all time! Let thy wanderings be forever at night and thy lone companion a mask that shall mark thee to the end of thy days!"

So saying, another light blinded Robb before he collapsed in a dead faint. It was not until the cold waters of the Camilarri washed him onto one of its familiar muddy banks, near his favorite cedar groves, that he awoke. Was this all a dream? Rubbing his eyes, he found that the bright light of the sun hurt him, so he crawled into the shade with what was left of his bundle.

Opening it for a snack, as he was growing very hungry, Robb reached in and found only sand

